DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 081 022 CS 200 705

AUTHOR McLeod, Jack M.; And Others
TITLE Another Look at the Agenda Setting Function of the Press.
PUB DATE Aug 73
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (Ft. Collins, Colorado, August 19-22, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; Beliefs; Bias; Content Analysis; Interpersonal Relationship; Journalism; *News Media; Newspapers; *Opinions; *Political Influences; *Political Issues; *Press Opinion; Surveys; Voting
IDENTIFIERS *Agenda Setting

ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that the news media, especially in specific expressions of press opinion, have the effect of setting the agenda of issues in many political campaigns. The nature and extent of such agenda-setting is not yet established, although a study of two test newspapers tends to define further this effect. An analysis of the conservative "State Journal" and the liberal "Capital Times," both of Wisconsin, shows that, indeed, press opinion has an influence on the rank-ordering of political issues by the readerships. However, so many variables are at work in the formation of political attitudes that clear-cut methodologies do not yet exist. A content analysis of these two sample newspapers does show, nevertheless, that in interpersonal communication (as opposed to intrapersonal) political opinions conform, to a degree, to press opinion. (CH)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE CO

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRE
SENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 081022

# ANOTHER LOOK AT THE AGENDA SETTING FUNCTION OF THE PRESS

Jack M. McLeod, Lee B. Becker and James E. Byrnes

Mass Communications Research Center

University of Wisconsin--Madison

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPY-RIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jack M. McLeod
Lee B. Becker

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL IN-STITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRO-DUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM RE-QUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPY-RIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James E. Byrnes

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL IN-STITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRO-DUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM RE-QUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Paper presented to the Theory and Methodology Division

Association for Education in Journalism

Ft. Collins, Colorado

August 1973

CS 200 705

# ANOTHER LOOK AT THE AGENDA SETTING FUNCTION OF THE PRESS

A quarter century has passed since Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) published their "classic" study of communication and voting behavior. Despite the facts that the major inferences about communication were based on only 483 respondents in only one county in Ohio, that the chosen Erie County voted strongly Republican in that Democratic election year of 1940, and that a pre-television campaign was necessarily involved, the results of that study have remained largely unchallenged until the last few years. The media were seen as having little direct effect on voters since most of those studied in 1940 made their choice before the campaign began and tended to selectively expose themselves during the campaign to information which agreed with their position and to avoid material opposing their choice. It was first suggested here that the media have limited direct effect in that ideas flow "from radio and print to opinion leaders and from them (the leaders) to the less active sections of the population" (p. 151).

The most direct challenge to Lazarsfeld, et al., has come from Sears and Freedman (1967) who, after reviewing the evidence on selective exposure, concluded that there is no evidence for a "general psychological preference" for supportive information and only equivocal evidence regarding "de facto" selectivity. Under some circumstances, people seem to prefer supportive information; in other circumstances, they seem to prefer material contradicting their previous position. While Mills (1968), after reviewing the selective exposure literature, draws conclusions in conflict with those of Sears and Freedman, namely that considerable support has been found for the hypothesized preference for supportive information, there seems to be little substantial, experimental evidence for the <u>active</u> avoidance of discrepant material.

Other challenges to the "classic" effects position have been less direct; most have argued for the addition of possible effects other than direct conversion to the repetoire of mass communication impacts. For example, in a recent panel study of young voters in the 1970 British general election conducted by the Centre for Television Research at the University of Leeds, the criterion studied was turn-out (voting as opposed to abstaining on election day) rather than party switching (Blumler and McLeod, 1973). Three forms of media influence were identified: a quantitative relationship where higher exposure rates were found to be associated with higher turnout even after a host of socio-economic and political variables were controlled; a relational influence depending for its effect on the congruence or incongruence of the material in the medium with the person's pre-existing party attitudes (the readers of incongruent newspapers were more likely to abstain); and a qualitative form of communication influence that is dependent upon the reaction of the person to the political communication he receives during the campaign. A fairly substantial group of relatively well-informed young Labour Party supporters watched the first party broadcast of their party and were apparently "turned off" to a degree that many did not vote on election day. A fourth potential political role of the media appeared in the Leeds data in the strong connection between the number of party broadcasts viewed and the extent of interpersonal interaction, which in turn lead to a strong increase in voter turnout. The data also are in opposition to the Lazarsfeld, et al., proposition that committed party voters would become increasingly selective in their exposure to the mass media. While the young British voters did increase viewing of their own party broadcasts late in the campaign, their viewing of opposition broadcasts increased even more sharply.

Among the potential additions presented by this reexamination of communication impact is the "agenda setting" effect, studied most recently by McCombs and Shaw (1972), McCombs, et al., (1972), and McCombs and Weaver (1973). The basic proposition is that the media have their effect indirectly by choosing certain

issues for emphasis, thus making those issues more salient in the judgment and expectations of the voters. This would be expected to be particularly important during political campaigns. To the extent that the agenda as set by the media force the campaign "games" to be played in a "court" more favorable to one candidate than another, the effect may be to change not only the "action" but also the outcome of the contest.

While these and other studies of effects outside the election campaign context vary in design and emphasis, they seem to share certain tendencies that are of some importance to mass communication research generally. First, they have diverged from an almost exclusive focus on direct persuasion and conversion effects to examining as criteria of effect other forms of overt behavior (e.g., voter turnout and political activity), knowledge gains and more subtle forms of cognitive change. The previous dominance of persuasive effects is not simply the result of the earlier voting studies, but more so the reflection of the dominant place experimental attitude change research has had in the field until recent years. The second common focus is that most of these studies use a more differentiated concept of media exposure, looking at types of content used, motivative for use, etc., rather than a simple dichotomy of user versus non-user. An example of this differentiated exposure approach is asking the respondent <u>which</u> newspaper he or she uses, not simply whether he or she reads a newspaper. Finally, these studies tend to point to <u>interactive</u> effects of media rather than simple main effects by using theoretical propositions combining levels and qualities of media variables with those of social structure and interpersonal communication.

## Historical Development of the Agenda Setting Concept

While the precise roots of the agenda setting concept are difficult to locate, its traces appear in both Walter Lippmann's (1922) description of the formation of the "pictures in our heads" as well as in the discussion of the news gathering process by journalist-turned-sociologist Robert Ezra Park (1925). Lazarsfeld

et al., (1948) do not seem to have used the concept, but they do allude to the mobilizing effects of the media during a political campaign. Those effects could be generated either by general arousal of interest and emotion or differential arousal of certain groups by focusing on particular issues. In their study of Elmira, New York, during the 1948 presidential campaign, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) report data relevant to agenda setting when they show that those respondents high on campaign exposure were better able to state major campaign themes than those less exposed. Unfortunately, controls were not used sufficient to state that it was exposure per se rather than a host of other variables associated with exposure that was causally related to knowing the major themes of the campaign.

Drawing from unreported data gathered by McPhee and his associates during the 1952 Congressional races, Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton and Linz (1954) report that voters changed considerably during the course of the campaign on what they considered the important issues of the day. The most immediate effect of political "propoganda," they said, is upon the voters' feeling of saliency of issues. Short-term exposure to political materials in the media probably does not affect people's attitudes greatly, they conclude, but it can well affect the way they see a concrete electoral situation and thereby can affect their final voting decision.

A more explicit statement regarding the agenda setting function is contained in Cohen's (1963) book on the press and foreign policy:

> "...(T)he press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read...The editor may believe he is only printing the things that people want to read, but he is thereby putting a claim on their attention, powerfully determining what they will be thinking about, and talking about, until the next wave laps their shore." (p. 13)

Unfortunately, Cohen was concerned only with the relationship of the Washington correspondents and their foreign policy news sources in government.

While there can be little doubt that the news and value judgments of these correspondents and their editors shape the content of foreign policy news content, there is no direct evidence gathered from the audience that this "agenda" affects the reading public.

Some empirical evidence was provided in a study of the 1964 presidential campaign conducted by the Mass Communication Research Center (McLeod et al., 1965; McLeod, 1965). Interest was centered around two specific campaign issues: control of nuclear weapons and a set of items reflecting concern with spending policies of the incumbent, Democratic administration. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of these issues among several others as being important issues in the campaign. The conditions of a natural quasi-experiment were provided by the presence in Madison of two newspapers of sharply differing editorial viewpoints. Even casual observers quickly see that these differences are by no means confined to the editorial page. A test of agenda setting was thus provided by looking within groupings of adherents of each party to see if the paper they read affected the ranking of the two issues. The results confirmed the necessity for controlling for party affiliation: Democrats were more likely to see nuclear testing control as being important while Republicans were more likely to give higher salience ratings to the general spending issue. Within each party, however, those respondents reading the evening progressive-liberal Capital Times gave relatively higher ratings of importance to nuclear testing while readers of the morning conservative Wisconsin State Journal gave more weight relatively to spending issues. A subsequent content analysis confirmed that each paper had given twice as much attention to the issue seen as the more salient by its readers.

The potential importance of agenda setting was further emphasized by the finding that among our Madison respondents, those who gave higher salience ratings to nuclear control relative to spending were more likely to have more "image conflict" with Barry Goldwater and to switch or to be unsure about their voting

choice. While this is strong argument for agenda setting, we might also entertain an alternative explanation: that the more strongly politicized members of each party not only are apt to have views in agreement with their parties' choice, and to have less image conflict," but they might also be more likely to choose a newspaper whose editorial viewpoint is in agreement with their own views. In short, the choice of newspaper may be a matter of de facto selective exposure. Within the limits of our study, we tried to test this by analyzing and controlling for the respondents' own attitude position on these issues and by the strength of his party commitment. Surprisingly, the latter variable had only negligible association with perceived issue salience and "image conflict," and only a modest tendency for the stronger party affiliators to select a consonant newspaper. Respondents' own positions on issues showed a lesser correlation with image conflict and newspaper read than did our perceived issue salience. Control for own position did not eliminate the direction of the basic salience findings. The agenda setting interpretation remained the more tenable explanation.

While the 1965 findings were intriguing and suggestive of further agenda setting research, they were based on data with severe methodological limitations. The study was designed to analyze other types of questions about political communication and the perceived issue salience results were largely serendipitous. Since we were using research methodology course students as volunteer interviewers, the size of the sample was only 137 for our agenda setting analysis. For the control analysis, the size of several cells became quite small. The nature of the data did not permit straightforward statistical testing and the differences were consistent but not overwhelming. As a result, the agenda setting findings remained in the dust bin of old convention papers and were never formally published. The present paper is intended as a more refined test of our earlier findings.

More recent studies show the rising interest in the agenda setting concept. While not directly testing agenda setting, Repass (1971) has offered data to

support his argument that certain methodological problems have led to an underestimation of the predictive power of the perceived importance (salience) of campaign issues in predicting the direction of voting behavior. Also of indirect relevance is the earlier mentioned British young voter study (Blumler and McLeod, 1973) that shows reading of an opposition newspaper to be a predictor of voting abstention. Unfortunately, pre-campaign issue salience was not related to turnout, but perhaps it was tied to other voting outcomes. Likewise, shift in issue salience during the campaign was not included in the abstention analysis. McCombs and his associates recently published several valuable studies dealing directly with the concept. We will discuss these studies in more detail in our review of the test for the agenda setting hypothesis.

## The Agenda Setting Concept

The agenda setting hypothesis asserts the media exert influence through the choice of certain issues for emphasis in news presentations and editorial comment as well as the omission of other issues. While there is little conflict regarding the thrust of this assertion in the literature, there is some question as to the proper indicant of influence. In other words, the dependent variable for the hypothesis has varied, stemming, perhaps, from the diverse origins of the concept. Park (1925) was most concerned with the effects of media presentation on the topics of conversation within a community served by the media; Lippmann (1922) was most concerned with the effects of the media presentation on the audience's view of reality.

McCombs and his associates have followed Lippmann, using an intrapersonal concept rather than an interpersonal one more in the Park tradition. McCombs and Shaw (1972) operationalized the concept by asking respondents:

> "What are you most concerned about these days. That is, regardless of what politicians say, what are the two or three main things which you think the government should concentrate on doing something about?"

McCombs, Shaw and Shaw (1972), in the first of three studies reported, operationalized the dependent variable by asking the respondents which topics they regarded as "personally important." In the second study, "voters were asked to describe the issues which they thought should be the major issues in the 1972 campaign." And in the third study, respondents were asked:

> "Regardless of what the politicians are saying, what do you think are the three main issues facing the country today?"

A similar question was also asked "about the issues facing North Carolina."

In the McCombs and associates' operationalizations the dependent influence variables are intrapersonal. Yet the notion of the media setting the agenda for its audience seems to allow for a more general definition involving community or interpersonal interaction. A proper operationalization of this latter concept could involve asking respondents both what they talk about with other members of the community and what issues other community members are raising with them. The idea is much closer to the interpersonal influence research done by Lazarsfeld and his associates. (One could also argue with the inclusion in the McCombs and Shaw (1972) study of the requirement that the issue be one the government should "do something about," since it could be an issue the government should not get involved in.)

There seems to be some conceptual justification, in addition, for distinguishing between at least two different yet potentially related intrapersonal effects of the media's presentation of the events of the day. First, the media could change the view of social reality that the respondent has by indicating which issues are those being discussed by the candidates, those that will be discussed by friends in the future, or those that will be used by other voters in their decisions about the candidates. Second, the media could increase the importance of the issue to the individual, that is, make the issue more salient for the individual for some present or future decision he or she will have to make. In terms used by Chaffee and his students (See Chaffee, et al., 1969; Tipton, 1970), the effect

could be that of bringing an issue to the fore as a discriminating attribute in future choices, at the ballot box or elsewhere. While we would expect some relationship between both of these possible intrapersonal effects, that relationship need not be perfect. It doesn't seem unlikely that an individual could admit that he or she thought the Vietnam War was important in the campaign, since everyone was talking about it, but that it wasn't important to that individual since, regardless of what the candidates said, neither would be able to settle the conflict.

To summarize, the distinctions we would like to make are between the following three variables:

1. The interpersonal effects of agenda setting indicated by the increased discussion of the issues displayed by the media by members of the community. This is the actual reality of the situation, and could be measured by asking sample members to recall conversations or by actually sampling conversations in the community. We will call this Community Issue Salience.

2. The perceived importance of the issues displayed in the media by an individual member of a community. The importance is not in terms of individual needs, desires or wants, but in terms of what is socially true. In other words, this is an individual's perception of the reality tapped in part in variable 1. We will call this Perceived Issue Salience.

3. The perceived importance of the issues displayed by the media by the individual member of the community in terms of individual needs, desires or wants. This perception is conceptually independent of what the individual perceives to be the case in reality, i.e., independent of what others think, say or do. We will call this Individual Issue Salience.

While it is an empirical question which of these concepts will eventually be most useful in prediction to other political variables, such as voting and campaign activity, what seems most important at present is that researchers make clear the distinctions and their choice of variable for study. It appears from

the operationalizations used by McCombs and his associates that aspects of both of the intrapersonal concepts are being tapped. To further complicate the problem, some of their discussions and analyses seem to indicate they are also concerning themselves with the interpersonal concept, which we have labeled Community Issue Salience. Some of the ambiguities of the McCombs data, which we will discuss later, may be due to this problem.

For the remainder of this paper we will concern ourselves primarily with our second variable, which we have labeled Perceived Issue Salience. While we will try to relate our discussions to the other concepts where relevant, the major thrust of our arguments deal only with concept 2, Perceived Issue Salience.

## Testing the Agenda Setting Hypothesis

The agenda setting hypothesis is of interest only if the agenda available to a person vary; that is, if the agenda selected by the media differ from some objective assessment of reality, if they differ from the election agenda as perceived by political leaders of the parties, or if they show variation among the media outlets. Individual newsmen vary in personal beliefs, values and perceptions of audience needs and desires. News organizations vary in structure and approach. These differences influence the many choices involved in making the final product or agenda of news. The research on gatekeeping and information control within the newsroom, reviewed by Donohue, Tichenor and Olien (1972), supports the notion that these variables do have impact on the news presented to the public.

The central proposition of the agenda setting hypothesis is that an audience member exposed to a given agenda will adjust his or her Perceived Issue Salience in the election campaign in the direction corresponding to the amount of attention devoted to that issue in the news medium or outlet used. The index of attention given the issue in the medium should include some combination of frequency of mention and relative prominence in placement or display. The index should not include direction of partisan position expressed in the content since those factors

are not expected to be related to the agenda setting test. It is this feature that takes the agenda setting concept out of the more familiar territory of persuasion research. The emphasis of issues is not a "signed" or affective element of the media content; its effect on voting behavior or other political behavior is expected to be indirect rather than direct. The agenda setting concept also implies that the shift in Perceived Issue Salience should take place independently from the audience member's own previous partisan position. That does not mean that all audience members should end up with identical Perceived Issue Saliences, but it does mean that relatively equal shifts are expected regardless of different starting points. We would expect that Democrats, Republicans and Independents all should manifest effects of exposure to a particular agenda in terms of Perceived Issue Saliences. These effects should particularly manifest themselves in comparisons of the exposed and the non-exposed within each of these political categories.

Strictly speaking, the agenda setting hypothesis might be considered to be upheld if data relevant to the proposition of differential Perceived Issue Saliences are supportive. If the agenda setting hypothesis is to be considered socially important as well as statistically operative, however, it is necessary to go beyond this to test whether a different ordering of Perceived Issue Saliences produces an effect on voting behavior or some other political consequence. Unfortunately, the agenda setting proposition is somewhat unclear as to the process by which these subsequent effects are manifested. One possibility is that the content emphases set up expectations about what issues are most relevant to the community in the election and that Perceived Issue Salience judgments are made with respect to perceptions of the issues for the community. The effect, then, might result from the person initiating interpersonal communication on topics he sees as most salient for others around him. To the extent he receives from others around him information favorable or unfavorable to one or the other of the candidates, influence on voting behavior would be evidenced. The prediction might then be not

a main effect of Perceived Issue Salience but rather an interaction between such saliences and the political congruency or incongruency of the person's social and political environment. On the other hand, if the agenda setting effect on voting is more direct, depending only on the candidate's stands on various issues, then the emphasis given these issues would enter into voting behavior predictions. One assumption necessary for making any such voting behavior predictions is that certain issues are better than others to garner votes for a given candidate and the candidate is fortunate if the agenda is set making salient those issues most favorable to him.

In terms of testing the agenda setting hypotheses, the first requirement is to set up a proper control against which to compare the Perceived Issue Saliences of users of a given medium outlet. The ideal control would be users of another medium outlet who are as similar as possible to the "test" audience on various socioeconomic and political attributes, yet use a medium displaying and emphasizing issues different from those used by the "test" group. In this way, we would be able to compare two equivalent audience groups with markedly different content agendas. Such equivalence is not likely to be realized if we merely compare users vs. non-users of a given medium outlet or those exposed to the same outlet to greater or lesser degrees. These comparisons are apt to contrast groups so different on other variables (e.g., education, and attitudes) that statistical controls may be ineffective. Our use of the two Madison newspapers provides a far better control, although even here we may be far from approaching a "random assignment" of respondents to groups that a true experiment would provide. Previous research has shown the readers of the conservative Wisconsin State Journal to be somewhat higher than average in income than readers of the liberal Capital Times, and our 1964 study showed beyond chance de facto selective choice of paper by political party identification. (By chance, 54 percent of respondents would have read the newspaper congruent with their party choice; 79 percent of the sample actually did so.)

Despite this apparent selectivity, sufficient numbers of respondents do read a paper incongruent with their party preference to make valid comparisons. Party preference is, nonetheless, an important control variable in our analyses. (From here on we will discuss the agenda setting hypothesis in terms of newspaper content; the hypothesis, however, should hold regardless of which media content are of interest.)

The second requirement for testing agenda setting hypotheses is to be able to show greater agreement between the content emphases given issues of each comparison newspaper and the Perceived Issue Saliences of its audience (same newspaper, same audience comparison) than between each newspaper's content issue emphases and the Perceived Issue Saliences of those not in its audience (same newspaper opposite audience comparison). The design as illustrated by the Madison situation is shown in Figure 1. The key correlations are 1. and 2., the content emphases by Perceived Issue Saliences associations within the same newspaper and audience. The point is, however, that this is necessary but not sufficient to show that either or both of these correlations are beyond chance or near perfect. To make a case for the specific influence of that newspaper, you must be able to show that these basic correlations are clearly higher than those for the cross newspaper-audience correlations, illustrated by 3. and 4. in Figure I. One would not be able to do that if the content agenda were highly correlated (relationship 5.) and/or if the Perceived Issue Saliences of the two audiences were highly similar (relationship 6.). We can guard against the content saliences being too high by picking newspapers and issues contrasting as much as possible. A high agreement in Perceived Issue Saliences is prevented by these same conditions and by the strong operation of the research hypothesis.

In the comparison of users of two competing newspapers within the same community (if we're lucky enough to find such a situation), we are faced with certain design problems. The first concerns what to do about respondents who use

both newspapers. One solution is to pick the paper used most for politics; another is to treat multiple readers as a special group for analytic purposes. Another problem group is the non-readers of either paper, who may be dropped from the analysis or treated as a special group. In most cases, they will be either the low-educated, poorly informed respondents or the opposite--elite readers of out-of-town newspapers. The treatment of both multiple readers and non-readers depends very much upon their numbers in the sample drawn.

Up to this point, we have been treating use of a given newspaper as a dichotomous choice (a person either reads or doesn't read a given paper). Such factors as the extent of the reader's interest in the political news of the paper should operate as contributory conditions magnifying the agenda setting effects. Such a finding would greatly strengthen the basic agenda setting argument. In a similar way, the degree of dependence on the given outlet (e.g., if the respondent reads only that paper or depends on that medium most) can be brought in as a potential contributory condition.

On the other hand, there are several conditions that should <u>not</u> affect the basic content emphasis by Perceived Issue Salience relationship. As we have said earlier, the relationship should hold for members of both political parties as well as for Independents. It should not be contingent on the person's own attitudes toward the issues in the campaign. Controls for a host of other variables (e.g., age, sex, socio-economic status, occupation, parental background) should not affect the results. The gratifications sought in use of the media (e.g. for vote guidance, reinforcement, escape), and general elements of cognitive style (selective exposure and selective perception as general personality patterns) should also be independent of the strength of the agenda setting relationship. That is not to say that any or all of these factors might not alter the person's Perceived Issue Salience; it only asserts that there is no interaction such that any level of these other variables eliminates the agenda setting relationship. In that sense, a very

large number of possible third variables can be considered as potential alternative explanations and should be included in the strong analysis of the basic hypothesis.

Even if the agenda setting data withstand the challenge of third variable controls, there is a final possibility that should be considered. That is the reverse causation assertion that, rather than the paper's content emphasis affecting the audience's Perceived Issue Saliences, the content of the paper may merely reflect a sensitivity to the priorities of its readers. Given our suspicions and some supportive data suggesting that the perceptions of media gatekeepers are often inaccurate and that content to some extent also reflects the news policies of the paper, the reverse causation explanation may appear to be unlikely. (See Martin, O'Keefe and Nayman, 1972, and Donohew, 1967.) But it is a possibility that should be checked, for example, by a panel design studying a group of new readers of a given set of media at time one and looking for changes in their Perceived Issue Saliences at time two.

As discussed earlier, the basic agenda setting hypothesis involves only the Perceived Issue Saliences as the dependent variable. To have importance as an explanation of the effects of mass communication, however, the agenda setting proposition and a fuller agenda setting theory should be extended to test outcomes in terms of voting direction and turnout. We might also study other effects like increased interpersonal communication and stronger information seeking preferences for the issues perceived more salient. If we cannot show such effects, then the agenda setting hypothesis is interesting but of lesser practical significance. It should be noted, however, that the agenda can affect the contending political candidates and thus <u>indirectly</u> affect the voting public.

Recent Research on Agenda Setting: The McCombs, et al., Studies

McCombs and Shaw (1972), in a 1968 study of 100 respondents in Chapel Hill, N.C., who, by October 6, had not yet decided how they were going to vote, found rather strikingly high rank order correlations between what voters offered as

important issues and what the media were presenting. In other words, the frequency of issues cited by voters correlated highly with the frequency with which these same issues appeared in the media. A limitation of the study, intended by its authors, is the use of only uncommitted voters, who are likely to be the most susceptible to media influence. The agenda setting hypothesis, as noted above, should hold even for those voters with firm commitments. Another limitation, corrected in later studies by the same authors, stems from the lack of sufficient controls for users and non-users and users provided with different agenda. (In fact, rather high correlations between all the media content analysed were reported.) The point is that there are many reasons why the media agenda and the public perceived agenda might agree; not all of these involve the direct transmission of the agenda through the mass media. In addition, one can question whether the rank order statistic comparing composite media and community variables is the proper test of the intrapersonal concept (our Individual Issue Salience) used by McCombs.

McCombs, Shaw and Shaw (1972) reported three later studies also showing support for the agenda setting hypothesis. In the first of these studies, attention was devoted to audience response to short-term changes in the agenda. It was found that television and the newspapers content analysed presented relatively similar content emphasis and that the "world pictures" of the viewers-readers were relatively similar to the "composite" picture presented by the media. Differential content emphases, however, were not studied in relation to the Perceived Issue Saliences of their users.

The second study went to the basic agenda setting hypothesis more directly. In the key comparisons, the rank order correlation between what readers of the test newspaper thought should be the major issues of the 1972 campaign and the front page content of the paper was +.63; the non-readers level of agreement was +.52. While this is in the direction predicted by the agenda setting formulation, the

difference of .11 is far short of that required for statistical significance with only 60 respondents. If all news sections are used for the comparison instead of only the front page, the differences between the readers and non-readers fade entirely.

The second study also suggests that using television for political news is a contingent condition for newspaper agenda setting such that only under high political television use did newspaper readers show more agreement with content emphases than did non-readers. It might be thought that the "political television use" variable is really a "surrogate" to general public affairs media use, and that such use leads people to pay closer attention to the media and adopt the agenda they present. But other findings suggest this is not the case; another potential public affairs surrogate, degree of "use of newspapers for politics," bore only a slight and irregular relationship to agenda setting. These qualifications weaken the support for the agenda setting hypothesis.

The third McCombs, et al., study of 108 young, first-time voters offers controls for frequency of use of both the test newspaper and the test television station. The rank order correlation between the issues offered by frequent newspaper readers and those presented in the test newspaper was +.70, while the same comparison for the infrequent readers produced only a +.38 correlation. Unfortunately, the control group made up of readers and users of other media also showed a +.70 correlation for this comparison. Similar comparisons for television users showed mostly null findings. The only consistent findings for <u>state</u> (as opposed to national) agenda setting were that frequent readers of the test paper showed a +.78 correlation with the content emphases while infrequent readers showed a -.02 correlation for the same comparison and the "other" group showed a -.27.

When television use, which appeared as a contingent condition in the second study, was introduced as a control it again appeared to wash out the agenda setting

effect among the infrequent users of television for politics. The role of interpersonal communication was also examined in the third study, the results suggesting that the effect of interpersonal communication is to offset the agenda setting effect of the newspaper.

McCombs and Weaver (1973), in a study of registered voters in Charlotte, N.C., offer further evidence regarding possible limiting conditions for the agenda setting hypothesis. Key comparisons suggest that uncertainty of voting choice (measured by consistency of voting history and certainty of immediate presidential choice) and relevance of the campaign to the individual serve as contingent conditions for the operation of agenda setting. The agenda presented by the test newspaper seemed to affect only those voters who were "uncertain" of voting choice and found the campaign "relevant."

While the studies done by McCombs and his associates offer some support for the general agenda setting hypotheses, the results also raise many questions about the ability of the findings to hold up under more rigid controls. What we have suggested in this paper is just such a set of controls, which, we think, are necessary for a fuller test of the agenda setting hypotheses. It is unlikely that all the questions that remain can be answered simply and in one study. We have attempted to answer some of these questions, however, in our own study.

## Study Design

During September and the first two weeks of October of 1972 personal interviews were conducted with 389 potential voters in Madison, Wisconsin by students enrolled in a Communication Research Methods course at the University of Wisconsin. The systematic, probability sample was drawn from official voter registration lists for the city, with substitutions within the same dwelling unit allowed when the original sample member was no longer at that address. Substitutions were anticipated in advance because of the transitory nature of much of Madison's university-related population, and interviewers were told to choose same-sex and

approximate-same-age substitutions from within the living unit. The non-student areas of the city were oversampled to increase the size of the non-student subsample.

The interview schedule, part of a larger study of young voters, included items designed to measure general media use, sources of political information, and demographic and background variables. In addition, the schedule asked the respondents to name daily newspapers read regularly as well as which of those newspapers (if more than one was mentioned) the respondent used more for news of politics and current events.

About half way through the interview the respondents were handed a list of six general issues "which you may have heard or read about in the current Presidential campaign." The respondents were asked to indicate "which issue has been most important so far?" The respondents then indicated the next most important issue until all six of the issues had been assigned a rank from one to six. The six issues, selected because of anticipated differences in their play in the two test newspapers, were: Defense Spending, Combating Crime, Honesty in Government, America's World Leadership, The Vietnam War and The Tax Burden. Ties in respondent's rankings of the issues were coded down. The respondent's rankings of these six issues were considered measures of Perceived Issue Salience.

The emphasis of the question, then, is toward perceptions of which of the issues being discussed during the campaign "has been most important." This was considered to be a cleaner measure than those used by McCombs and his associates, who have allowed respondents to interpret "important" in terms of individual needs. In addition, we opted for providing the subjects a predetermined list, rather than allow them to provide their own. This allowed us to make some estimation of what the agenda was likely to be in the test newspapers, select issues likely to differ for those media, and require the respondent to tell us the importance of those same issues. Open ended questions used by McCombs and his associates do not allow this much control. With the open ended method, there is no ability to

gauge an individual's estimation of importance of an issue unless it was mentioned. Our method allowed for a comparative ranking of the same issues for the complete sample.

These same issue categories were used for a content analysis of both of Madison's daily newspapers, the liberal Capital Times and the conservative Wisconsin State Journal. Issues of both newspapers published Monday through Saturday from September 1 through October 14 were analysed. Analysis was confined to the front and jump news pages of the papers and the editorial page of each. Total number of inches for each issue were summed for a given page; included in the sum were headlines and pertinent pictures. Coding was done by the third author of this paper. Check coding by the second author produced a .944 coefficient of agreement for the State Journal and .961 coefficient for the Capital Times.

## Results

The results of the content analysis, presented in Table I, show rather striking differences between our test newspapers, the liberal Capital Times and the conservative State Journal. On two of the issues, Honesty in Government and The Vietnam War, the two papers presented markedly different emphases; the State Journal devoted 56.6% of the space given to the selected six issues to coverage of the Vietnam conflict and negotiations and only 16.3% of that space to the Honesty in Government issue, which consisted mostly of coverage of the Watergate scandal. The Capital Times devoted 37.2% of its issue space to the Vietnam Issue and 48.7% of that space to the Honesty in Government issue, again mostly the Watergate developments.

For both newspapers, Table I shows, the Vietnam War was a central issue and dominated the news space. For the liberal Capital Times, however, the Honesty in Government issue became so overriding that relatively little space was devoted to

the other issues, excepting the Vietnam War. The State Journal shows a more even distribution. In terms of actual number of inches, however, the Capital Times devoted over twice as much space to our selected six issues as did the State Journal. In fact, the Capital Times actually devoted more inches to the Vietnam War than did the State Journal. The relative emphasis, however, seems more appropriate for the agenda setting test. This difference in volume of campaign content, however, raises the question as to whether the campaign itself varies in salience depending on the newspaper read.

Table I also indicates that the two test newspapers showed consistency across the pages content analysed the relative ranking of the six issues is essentially the same for the front and jump news pages and the editorial page. In terms of rank ordering of play given these campaign issues, at least, there is a relationship between news and editorial content.

Table 2 gives some preliminary indication of the fit of the data to the agenda setting hypothesis. The data show overwhelming support for selection of the Vietnam War as either the first or second most important issue by readers of both the liberal paper (Capital Times) and the conservative paper (Wisconsin State Journal), as well as the readers of other out of town papers. This strong choice of the War as the key issue seems even stronger than the content emphases of either of the local papers would suggest should be the case. particularly for readers of the liberal paper. Perhaps even more striking are the differences shown in Table 2 between young voters (under 25) and old voters. The young voters who relied on the liberal local paper seemed unwilling to select the Honesty in Government issue as one of the top two despite the heavy emphasis given the issue in that paper. Also the young voters (and to a lesser degree the old voters) selected defense spending as a major issue despite the lack of attention given that issue in either paper. While Table 2 offers some suggestion the agenda setting hypothesis may be working for the old voters, the data, as presented, are rather confusing.

Mean rankings for the six issues, shown in Table 3, offer some support for the agenda setting hypothesis when the older voters are considered. While the content emphasis given the Vietnam War by the conservative newspaper seems to have had no impact on the readers of that paper, the older readers of the liberal paper ranked the Honesty in Government issue significantly more important (a high score indicates a more important rank in Table 3) than did the readers of the conservative paper, which devoted little attention to the issue. For the Tax Burden and the Crime Issues, given greater attention in the conservative paper than in the liberal, the differences between the older readers of the two papers is in the expected direction ($p \leq .01$ and $p \leq .08$, respectively). Readers of the two papers show almost no differences in the rankings of the Defense Spending Issue and the World Leadership Issue (differences between papers for these issues were also slight). Both the non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the parametric Student's t allow essentially the same inferences from Table 3. (See Blalock, 1972).

While Table 3 might seem disconcerting in light of the expectations, there are sufficient reasons for expecting the young voters to be different from the older voters on variables which might be expected to qualify the agenda setting impact of the media. One such variable would be the extent to which the respondent relies on the newspaper for political information compared to other sources of such information, such as television or interpersonal contacts. When the users of the two test newspapers are divided into two groups, those who ranked the newspaper as their top "source of political information" and those who ranked it below other sources, the results are more consistent with the agenda setting expectations.

The effects of the type of media source of political information masked much of the impact of our test newspaper, as illustrated in Table 4. While the young voters who read the conservative paper and considered it the chief source of political information did indeed reflect the emphasis given the Vietnam War issue

in their rankings, the young readers relying mainly on another source for their political information did not. Essentially the same trend surfaces when the issue of Honesty in Government is considered. Young voters who considered newspapers as their top source of political news and the liberal paper their top newspaper ranked the honesty issue higher than did the readers of the conservative paper; those not choosing a newspaper as the chief source showed just the opposite trend. While the Combating Crime issue rankings for the young voters are also consistent with the agenda setting hypothesis, the rankings of the Tax Burden issue are not.

For the older voters, the control for choice of media as chief source of political information had less impact. For both groups, the Vietnam War Issue is not given rankings consistent with the hypothesis, though the Honesty in Government issue is. The strongest difference of Table 4 is between the mean ranking of the Tax Burden issue for those older voters not relying on the newspaper as the chief source of their political information. For both groups, however, the differences are in the predicted direction.

The effects of the "source of political information" variable are not so surprising when one considers that the young voters would be expected to be exposed to more differential agenda than the old voters in a city like Madison, where most of the young people have some connection with the University even if they aren't officially enrolled in classes. Old voters might be expected to have more consistent agenda presented to them.

One of the most striking findings in Tables 2 through 4 is the strength of the Vietnam War in terms of its perceived salience for readers of both papers, old and young voters, and those who rely on newspapers and other sources of political information. Also interesting is the relatively low ranking given the Honesty in Government issue despite the emphasis given the issue during the campaign. The suggestion is that the newspapers aren't able to determine the rank given the issue

by the reader relative to other issues so much as guarantee that, on the whole, readers of one paper will rank the issue higher than readers of the other. In other words, the liberal newspaper couldn't force the Honesty in Government issue to the top of the Perceived Issue Salience list, but it could produce greater salience of this issue for its readers relative to the perceived salience of the issue for readers of the opposition paper.

As argued in an earlier section of this paper, the impact of the media agenda must be strong enough to withstand the controlling out of the variance explained by party affiliation. This becomes particularly important if party affiliation has any impact on the choice of the newspaper relied on most for political news, as would be expected in the case for our respondents. Table 5 indicates that party affiliation does affect choice of paper. While selection of the liberal paper by Democrats is weaker than might be expected, the reverse selection of the conservative paper by Republicans is rather strong. Other factors, such as time of publication (the liberal paper is an evening daily, while the conservative paper is a morning daily), probably would explain some of the additional variance.

Table 6 shows the mean rankings of the six issues by party preference. While some differences are apparent (both young and old Democrats rank Honesty in Government higher than do Republicans, and young and old Republicans rank Tax Burden higher than do Democrats), party seems to play a lesser role than might be expected in determination of the Perceived Issue Saliences. Even for these two issues, however, there seems to be little consistency according to strength of party identification. For example, weak Republicans ranked Tax Burden higher than strong Republicans in the older voters sample, contrary to expectation. In the young voters sample, weak Democrats ranked Honesty in Government higher than did strong Democrats, again contrary to what would be expected. Our issues do not seem to follow clear partisan lines.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The agenda setting formulation seems to have suffered in past research from a lack of specificity regarding the proper criterion of media effect. In this paper we have attempted to trace the origins of the agenda setting expectations and have offered three separate dependent measures or criteria of media agenda setting effects. The first is a strictly interpersonal criterion, which we have labeled Community Issue Salience. The second is a perceptual level variable, which we have labeled Perceived Issue salience. The third criterion, which we have called Individual Issue Salience, is concerned with individual level values and expectations.

We have also attempted to list what we consider to be requirements for an adequate test of the agenda setting hypothesis as it relates to Perceived Issue Saliences. The first requirement is to set up a proper control against which to compare the Perceived Issue Saliences of users of a given medium. The ideal control would be users of another medium who are as similar as possible to the "test" audience. The second requirement is to be able to show greater agreement between the content emphases of each comparison medium and the Perceived Issue Saliences of its audience than between each medium's content issue emphases and the Perceived Issue Saliences of those not in its audience. We have argued that there are several conditions which should not affect the basic agenda setting hypothesis. Among this third class of variables which should not alter the relationship should be party identification and demographics, such as age, sex and socio-economic status.

In order to eliminate the reverse causation hypothesis, i.e., that the media content result from a sensitivity to the priorities of the readers, a final requirement is needed: data must be gathered at more than one point in time. This presents additional requirements regarding the proper time span of the study as well as the general financial problems resulting from large, across time research. Unless multi-time point data is gathered, however, the reverse hypothesis cannot be conclusively eliminated.

The study reported here illustrates some of the difficulties encountered in attempting to test the agenda setting hypothesis even with single time point data. We were only partially successful in isolating a situation in which different content emphases were presented to the readers of two newspapers. This may have been the result of our insensitivity to the key issues of the campaign, and the lack of clear partisan differences on the issues suggests this may have been the case. The decisions as to which issues were to be included in the survey questionnaire had to be made before the campaign really got underway, and what seemed like it might be an important issue in the late summer may have faded by October. In addition, it was necessary to make the issues broad enough so they included materials relevant to a wide range of specific topics and didn't appear to be partisan statements. This presents the danger that our issue categories were really too broad and the respondents didn't translate these to the particular events of the campaign. While these might seem to be arguments for using open-ended questions for determination of the Perceived Issue Saliences, we have argued that such questions result in severe analysis restrictions.

By sorting respondents in our study according to which test newspapers they relied on for political news, we were able to demonstrate, at least for the older voters, some effect of the content emphases on Perceived Issue Saliences. This effect was strengthened, particularly for the young voters, when we controlled for more general selection of a source of political information. For the young voters, the agenda being presented by those sources seem to be contradictory, as reflected in the Perceived Issue Saliences. For old voters, this control did not prove so important; little differences surfaced between the group that selected newspapers as the chief source of political information, and those who selected another source, often an interpersonal one. We have suggested that young voters may be exposed to more greatly varying agenda in their interpersonal and other media contacts.

We are not at this time able to show any effect of Perceived Issue Salience on other political variables of interest, such as voting choice and actual decision to vote. Further analysis should aid in answering the question of the significance of the Perceived Issue Salience variable in the larger political arena. We have suggested that lack of a clear demonstration of this relevance would indicate the agenda setting hypothesis is of limited practical significance.

It would seem precipitous to judge from our data that the agenda setting hypothesis should be swept aside in favor of another explanation. What we think is necessary, instead, is a reformulation of the hypothesis in terms of contributory and contingent conditions. We have found some support for the hypothesis; we need to clarify the conditions under which the hypothesis is likely to hold, identify the variables working in a complementary and contradictory fashion, and isolate the situations in which the media are unlikely to have impact on the Perceived Issue Saliences of their audience.

REFERENCES


Berelson, B., P. Lazarsfeld, and W. McPhee (1954). Voting. University of Chicago Press.

Blalock, H.M. (1972). Social Statistics. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Blumler, J., and J.M. McLeod (1973). "The Mass Media and Political Participation." Paper presented to Seminar on Sociological Theory and Research, Social Science Research Council, London, England.

Chaffee, S.H., K.R. Stamm, J.L. Guerrero, and L.P. Tipton (1969), Experiments on Cognitive Discrepancies and Communication. Journalism Monographs No. 14.

Cohen, B.C. (1963). The Press, the Public and Foreign Policy. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Donohew, L. (1967). "Newspaper Gatekeepers and Forces in the News Channel." Public Opinion Quarterly, 31: 61-8.

Donohue, G.A., P.J. Tichenor, and C.N. Olien (1972). "Gatekeeping: Mass Media Systems and Information Control." Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research, Vol. 1, Kline and Tichenor, ed. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.

Lazarsfeld, P., B. Berelson and H. Gaudet (1948). The People's Choice. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lippmann, W. (1922). Public Opinion. New York: Macmillan.

Lipset, S.M., P.F. Lazarsfeld, A.H. Barton and J. Linz (1954). "The Psychology of Voting: An Analysis of Political Behavior." In Gardner Lindzey, ed., Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. 2, pp. 1124-75.

Martin, R.R., G.J. O'Keefe and O.B. Nayman (1970). "Opinion Agreement and Accuracy Between Editors and Their Readers." Journalism Quarterly, 49: 460-8.

McCombs, M.E., and D.L. Shaw (1972). "The Agenda-setting Function of the Mass Media." Public Opinion Quarterly, 36: 176-87.

McCombs, M.E., D.L. Shaw and E.F. Shaw (1972). "The News and Public Response: Three Studies of the Agenda-setting Power of the Press." Paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, Carbondale, Ill.

McCombs, M.E., and David Weaver (1973). "Voters' Need for Orientation and Use of Mass Media." Paper presented to the International Communication Association, Montreal.

McLeod, J. (1965). "Political Conflict and Information Seeking." Paper presented at American Psychological Association convention, Chicago, Ill.

McLeod, J., D. Wackman, W. Hurt, and H. Payne (1965). "Political Conflict and Communication Behavior in the 1964 Political Campaign." Paper presented at AEJ convention, Syracuse, New York.

REFERENCES (continued)

Mills, J. (1968). "Selective Exposure to Information." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59: 250-9.

Park, R.E. (1925). The City. Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press.

RePass, D.E. (1971). "Issue Salience and Party Choice." American Political Science Review. Vol. 65, pp. 389-400.

Sears, D. and J. Freedman (1967). "Selective Exposure to Information: a Critical Review." Public Opinion Quarterly, 31: 194-213.

Tipton, L.P. (1970). "Effects of Writing Tasks on Utility of Information and Order of Seeking." Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 309-317.

TABLE 1

Content Agenda Saliences as presented by the Madison Capital Times (Lib) and the Wisconsin State Journal (Con): Front Page, Jump Page and Editorial Page*

| | Front Page | | Jump Page | | Editorial | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Issue | Lib | Con | Lib | Con | Lib | Con | Lib | Con |
| Vietnam War | 31.8% | 59.9% | 42.3% | 57.8% | 37.9% | 42.6% | 37.2% | 56.6% |
| Honesty in Government | 55.6 | 11.9 | 43.2 | 17.3 | 45.2 | 27.7 | 48.7 | 16.3 |
| Tax Burden | 9.6 | 12.3 | 6.5 | 8.8 | 3.9 | 8.1 | 7.3 | 10.3 |
| America's World Leadership | 1.6 | 5.9 | 5.1 | 7.7 | 6.8 | 15.0 | 4.0 | 7.9 |
| Defense Spending | 1.4 | 5.9 | 2.9 | 4.8 | 2.6 | - | 2.2 | 4.6 |
| Combating Crime | - | 4.3 | - | 3.6 | 3.6 | 6.6 | 0.6 | 4.3 |
| | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% |
| No. of Column inches | 2331 | 1248 | 2185 | 1082 | 1062 | 399 | 5578 | 2723 |

*Note: In this and the following tables the Capital Times will be referred to as the Liberal (Lib) paper while the Wisconsin State Journal will be referred to as the Conservative (Con) paper.

TABLE 2

Perceived Issue Salience: Per Cent of Readers of Selected Newspapers Choosing Each Issue as First or Second Most Important

YOUNG ADULT SAMPLE

Newspaper Read Most for Politics*

| | LIB | CON | OTHER LIB | ALL OTHER | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnam War | 82.4% | 85.4% | 88.2% | 84.4% | 84.8% |
| Honesty in Govt. | 22.1 | 20.1 | 29.4 | 21.9 | 22.4 |
| Tax Burden | 39.7 | 34.8 | 23.5 | 18.8 | 32.3 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 8.8 | 7.9 | 8.8 | 15.6 | 9.4 |
| Defense Spending | 31.2 | 40.5 | 44.1 | 53.1 | 43.1 |
| Combating Crime | 1.5 | 11.2 | 5.9 | 6.3 | 6.7 |
| N= | 68 | 89 | 34 | 32 | 223 |

OLDER ADULT SAMPLE

Newspaper Read Most for Politics*

| | LIB | CON | OTHER LIB | ALL OTHER | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnam War | 84.8% | 77.9% | 81.8% | 68.4% | 79.5% |
| Honesty in Govt. | 33.9 | 24.7 | 9.1 | 42.1 | 28.9 |
| Tax Burden | 28.8 | 53.3 | 18.2 | 36.8 | 39.4 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 11.8 | 6.5 | 9.1 | 31.6 | 11.4 |
| Defense Spending | 27.1 | 31.2 | 81.8 | 9.4 | 31.3 |
| Combating Crime | 11.9 | 6.5 | 0.0 | 5.3 | 7.8 |
| N= | 59 | 77 | 11 | 19 | 166 |

*NOTE: Newspaper readers were sorted on the following question: "Which daily paper do you use more for news of politics and current events?". The "OTHER LIB" readers mostly relied on the New York Times. Voters were divided by age into 25 and older, and under 25.

TABLE 3

Perceived Issue Salience: Mean Rankings of Six Issues by Age and Newspaper Read Most for Politics*

YOUNG ADULT SAMPLE

| | Newspaper Read Most for Politics | |
|---|---|---|
| | LIB | CON |
| Vietnam War | 4.51 | 4.46 |
| Honesty in Govt. | 1.98 | 1.94 |
| Tax Burden | 2.92 | 2.80 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.23 | 1.17 |
| Defense Spending | 3.18 | 3.16 |
| Combating Crime | 1.21 | 1.44 |
| N = | 68 | 89 |

OLDER ADULT SAMPLE

| | Newspaper Read Most for Politics | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LIB | CON | | | |
| Vietnam War | 4.34 | 4.20 | | | |
| Honesty in Govt. | 2.59 | 1.97 | t=2.14 | $p \leq .025$ | ($X^2$=6.29, $p \leq .05$) |
| Tax Burden | 2.81 | 3.34 | t=3.41 | $p \leq .01$ | ($X^2$=8.02, $p \leq .02$) |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.27 | 1.18 | | | |
| Defense Spending | 2.66 | 2.72 | | | |
| Combating Crime | 1.20 | 1.52 | t=1.53 | $p \leq .08$ | ($X^2$=13.18, $p \leq .01$) |
| N = | 59 | 77 | | | |

*NOTE: For computation of the means presented in this table the issue chosen as the most important was assigned the value 5, and assignment of values continued this way so that the least important issue was assigned the value 0. Ties were coded downward. Both the Student's t, which, strictly applied, requires interval data, and the non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of the difference between two distributions were computed. The latter statistic produces a Chi Square, presented in the parentheses to the right of the t test statistics. (See Blalock, 1972.) Where no test statistic is given, results are not significant.

TABLE 4

Perceived Issue Saliences: Mean Rankings of Six Issues by Age and Newspaper Read Most for Politics, With Relative Importance of Newspapers for Political Information As a Control*

NEWSPAPER TOP SOURCE OF POLITICAL INFORMATION

YOUNG ADULT SAMPLE

| | Newspaper Read Most for Politics | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LIB | CON | | |
| Vietnam War | 4.24 | 4.57 | t = 1.43 | p ≤ .08 |
| Honesty in Govt. | 2.12 | 1.61 | t = 1.50 | p ≤ .08 |
| Tax Burden | 3.27 | 2.85 | t = 1.56 | p ≤ .08 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.03 | 1.04 | | |
| Defense Spending | 3.27 | 3.22 | | |
| Combating Crime | 1.03 | 1.70 | t = 2.38 | p ≤ .01 |
| N = | 33 | 46 | | |

OLDER ADULT SAMPLE

| | Newspaper Read Most for Politics | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LIB | CON | | |
| Vietnam War | 4.37 | 4.24 | | |
| Honesty in Govt. | 2.49 | 1.76 | t = 1.87 | p ≤ .03 |
| Tax Burden | 3.08 | 3.33 | | |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.26 | 1.29 | | |
| Defense Spending | 2.43 | 2.71 | | |
| Combating Crime | 1.17 | 1.62 | t = 1.50 | p ≤ .08 |
| N = | 35 | 42 | | |

(continued)

TABLE 4 (continued)

NEWSPAPER NOT TOP SOURCE OF POLITICAL INFORMATION

YOUNG ADULT SAMPLE

Newspaper Read Most for Politics

| | LIB | CON | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnam War | 4.63 | 4.35 | t = 1.56 p ≤ .08 |
| Honesty in Govt. | 1.83 | 2.30 | |
| Tax Burden | 2.51 | 2.74 | |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.43 | 1.30 | |
| Defense Spending | 3.08 | 3.09 | |
| Combating Crime | 1.37 | 1.16 | |
| N = | 35 | 43 | |

OLDER ADULT SAMPLE

Newspaper Read Most for Politics

| | LIB | CON | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnam War | 4.29 | 4.23 | |
| Honesty in Govt. | 2.67 | 2.23 | |
| Tax Burden | 2.42 | 3.34 | t = 2.63 p ≤ .01 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.29 | 1.06 | |
| Defense Spending | 3.00 | 2.71 | |
| Combating Crime | 1.25 | 1.40 | |
| N = | 24 | 35 | |

*NOTE: For computation of the means presented in this table the issue chosen as the most important was assigned the value 5 and other issues were scaled downward so the least important issue received the value of 0. Where no test statistic is given, results are not significant.

TABLE 5

Newspaper Read Most by Party Affiliation

YOUNG ADULT SAMPLE

| | Strong Democrat | Weak Democrat | Independent | Weak Republican | Strong Republican |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Liberal paper | 55% | 44% | 21% | 17% | 29% |
| Conservative paper | 45% | 56% | 79% | 83% | 71% |
| N = | 83 | 25 | 28 | 6 | 14 |

$X^2 = 13.37$ $p \leq .005$

OLDER ADULT SAMPLE

| | Strong Democrat | Weak Democrat | Independent | Weak Republican | Strong Republican |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Liberal paper | 59% | 44% | 50% | 21% | 15% |
| Conservative paper | 41% | 56% | 50% | 79% | 85% |
| N = | 56 | 16 | 24 | 14 | 26 |

$X^2 = 15.57$ $p \leq .005$

TABLE 6

Perceived Issue Saliences: Mean Rankings of Six Issues

by Age and Party Affiliation*

YOUNG ADULT SAMPLE

| | Strong Democrat | Weak Democrat | Independent | Weak Republican | Strong Republican |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnam War | 4.44 | 4.60 | 4.54 | 4.13 | 4.35 |
| Honesty in Govt.** | 2.02 | 2.64 | 1.67 | 1.75 | 1.25 |
| Tax Burden** | 2.68 | 2.33 | 2.80 | 3.25 | 3.20 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.26 | 1.09 | 1.05 | 1.38 | 1.40 |
| Defense Spending | 3.24 | 3.07 | 3.18 | 3.63 | 3.10 |
| Combating Crime | 1.30 | 1.27 | 1.72 | 0.88 | 1.70 |
| N = | 110 | 45 | 39 | 8 | 20 |

OLDER ADULT SAMPLE

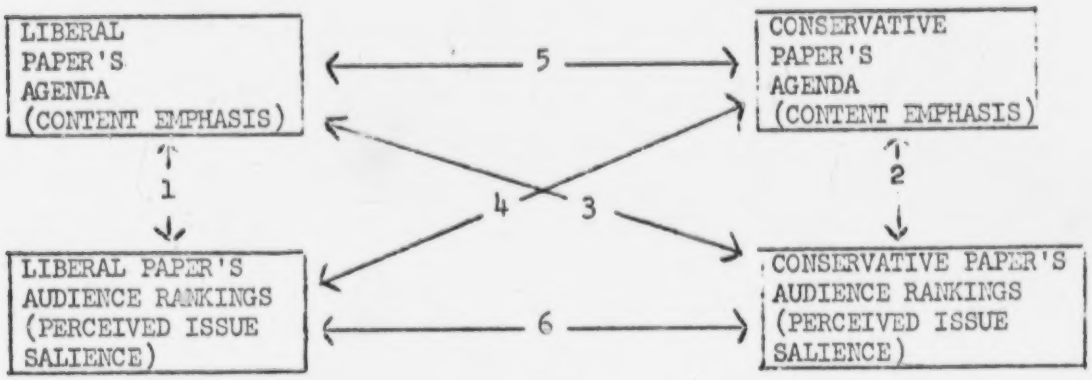
| | Strong Democrat | Weak Democrat | Independent | Weak Republican | Strong Republican |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vietnam War | 4.17 | 4.28 | 4.00 | 4.42 | 4.41 |
| Honesty in Govt.** | 2.58 | 2.33 | 2.52 | 1.35 | 1.83 |
| Tax Burden** | 2.83 | 3.11 | 2.81 | 3.77 | 3.17 |
| U.S. World Leadership | 1.54 | 0.83 | 1.52 | 1.41 | 0.93 |
| Defense Spending | 2.63 | 2.83 | 2.36 | 1.84 | 2.79 |
| Combating Crime | 1.21 | 1.56 | 1.65 | 1.29 | 1.83 |
| N = | 71 | 18 | 31 | 17 | 29 |

*NOTE: For computation of the means presented in this table the issue chosen as the most important was assigned the value 5, and assignment of values continued this way so that the least important issue was assigned the value 0. Ties were coded downward.

**For these issues, differences in rankings between Democrats (considered as one group) and Republicans (considered as one group) were significant at the .05 level using student's t.

FIGURE 1

Design for the Analysis of Agenda Setting Hypothesis




NOTE: Figure uses Madison newspaper situation as illustration; other outlets and media might be used in other situations. Numbers indicate correlation between the variables connected by arrows.
Agenda setting hypothesis predicts: 1 > 3; 2 > 4